

## IS A NEW FIELD ABOUT TO BE OPENED IN THE SCIENCE OF BACTERIOLOGY?

In this issue of CALIFORNIA AND WESTERN MEDICINE is printed an article having as its co-authors Arthur Isaac Kendall, Ph. D., of the department of research in bacteriology in Northwestern University Medical School, and Royal Raymond Rife, Ph. D., of San Diego, California. The caption of the article is "Observations on *Bacillus Typhosus* in Its Filterable State." The article is commended to the readers of CALIFORNIA AND WESTERN MEDICINE because it is a preliminary communication calling the attention of the world to a new type of microscope, which, if it fulfills its apparent advantages over any microscopes thus far developed, bids fair to lay the basis for revolutionary discoveries in bacteriology and the allied sciences. Whereas our present microscopes magnify from one to two thousand diameters, in this new microscope we have an instrument for which a magnification as high as seventeen thousand diameters is claimed. This is certainly a long stride from the initial efforts of Van Leeuwenhoek, whose simple instrument may be said to have laid the foundation for the science of bacteriology which later came into being; and by means of which science much of the world's progress, through man's conquest of the infective and other diseases, has been made possible.

It is a source of gratification to know that the development of this new instrument which offers so much for medical research in the future took place in good part in California. The paper presented in this issue by Doctors Kendall and Rife was presented at a meeting of Los Angeles and Pasadena colleagues held at the home of Dr. Milbank Johnson of Pasadena, who induced Doctor Kendall of Northwestern to come West to make some special investigations and tests. The meeting was held on November 20, just as this December number of CALIFORNIA AND WESTERN MEDICINE was going to press. The matter seemed so important to the editor that special efforts were made to have the paper appear in this December number. It is hoped to have other communications in future issues.

## IMPORTANT CALIFORNIA SUPREME COURT DECISION IN RE: EXPERT MEDICAL TESTIMONY

In the Medico-Legal column of the Miscellany Department of this month's CALIFORNIA AND WESTERN MEDICINE is printed a report on a very important medico-legal problem. The particular legal action was carried to the Supreme Court because of the important principles involved. It was Joseph Catton, M. D., of San Francisco, who created the question at issue, through his refusal to testify on behalf of the defendant in a personal injury case. He had been called by the attorney of the plaintiff to make an examination of the plaintiff, and he contended that it would therefore be unethical for him to testify at the request of the defendants; and, further, that the defendants, not having made arrangements to

financially compensate for testimony as an expert, he was therefore not obligated in law to give such testimony. (Report is printed in this issue of CALIFORNIA AND WESTERN MEDICINE, p. 472.)

The matters at issue were called to the attention of the Council of the California Medical Association, the Council then instructing the legal counsel, Mr. Hartley Peart, to enter into the case as a "friend of the court," in order that certain important professional interests of a legal nature could be called to the attention of the Supreme Court of California, to which court the case had been carried on appeal.

It is hoped that many of the readers of this journal will give themselves the pleasure and benefit of perusal of the report referred to.

It is gratifying to know that certain principles important to the medical profession were established through this decision of the Supreme Court of California. The fact is that many persons are prone to demand almost everything from members of the medical profession, in strong contrast to the manner in which real and personal property are hedged with legal safeguards. Here again is exemplified the need of constant vigilance and willingness to meet important issues as they arise. The Council of the California Medical Association and Mr. Peart, as legal counsel of the State Association, for their prompt and efficient action have the appreciation of members of the California Medical Association.

## COMMENT ON THIS AND THAT

*Cyanide Fumigation—Two Deaths Therefrom in Los Angeles.*—When California's sister state—Nevada—in lieu of the gallows or the electric chair installed its lethal chamber in which cyanide gas was used as the means of exit from earth for those of its citizens who had been condemned to death, that present day departure from procedures elsewhere established, was greeted with much newspaper comment and discussion. Even yet each such lethal chamber execution receives more than ordinary space in the daily press.

The efficacy of the cyanide method in producing almost instantaneous death is not gainsaid; but to have two young men in Los Angeles die by practically the same method, in a hotel in which one room was presumably infested with vermin (bedbugs), because the official fumigating firm did not completely close a steam pipe aperture leading to the room above, would seem an altogether too heavy a price to pay for so-called more effective modern-day methods of vermin destruction. The city of Los Angeles, and its public health department in particular, have a heavy task in explaining to the bereaved relatives and friends of the two young men whose lives were unceremoniously snuffed out, why such a method of vermin destruction, dangerous even though efficient—unless combined with adequate and meticulous supervision—should have been used.

These two unnecessary deaths naturally caused a furor in the lay press, and rightly so. If the

two young men during life had occupied high social or civic stations, the press notices and criticisms would no doubt have been doubled or trebled, and it would have been demanded of the civic authorities that immediate action be taken to prevent a repetition of such an occurrence. To the mother and relatives and friends of these young men, who thus lost their lives on November 16, the tragedy, however, is just the same and just as heartbreaking as if they had been civic leaders in the community.

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In this connection the question may be fairly put: "What expert knowledge and judgment will now be brought to bear on this case by the five lay citizens who, through appointment by the mayor of the city, constitute the health board of Los Angeles, and who in that capacity have the final say on public health activities in that city of more than one million persons?"

In the last analysis, must not the health board bear its goodly share of responsibility in what took place? For it is the health board which must not only supervise the administration of public health laws but which must take a leading part in bringing into being additions or changes in present health and sanitation laws, when such do not adequately protect human life.

In a function so important to the welfare and lives of citizens, should not such a health board be composed of citizens having that special knowledge and experience which could be of great value in the solution of public health problems?

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*Rabies Aboard Ship.*—Several months ago, CALIFORNIA AND WESTERN MEDICINE gave considerable space to a discussion of the rabies situation in Southern California. (See CALIFORNIA AND WESTERN MEDICINE, July, 1931, page 39.)

Dispatches of the Associated Press of November 17 told the story of a group of sailors who had been bitten by a dog smuggled aboard the United States destroyer *John D. Edwards* on October 15, when the ship was at Chefoo, China.

Arthur Brisbane, in his column in the *Examiner*, made the following pertinent comment on the incident:

"A small dog, smuggled aboard a destroyer in harbor by sailors that desired a playmate, bit ten of the seamen. What happened will interest those that say talk of rabies is all nonsense; also those that think disease is not real.

"The ten bitten concealed the fact. Three died of rabies, the other seven are in the hospital, undergoing treatment."

What took place was certainly a tragedy to the unsuspecting victims who, through disobedience of an order against dogs, brought the supposedly healthy dog aboard ship. A lesson also, as Brisbane indicates, to lay citizens who, from theoretical premises sufficient unto themselves, contend that the disease known as rabies exists only in the minds of members of the medical profession.

*A Newspaper "Sob Story"—Medical Attention Difficult to Secure.*—About November 18, Los Angeles newspapers printed a pathetic story of a penniless father and family resident in the outskirts of Los Angeles whose infant child of twenty months became ill and died at the end of two or three days. The infant was one of six children; the father was out of work and without means. This setting, with the fact that one or more doctors supposedly had been telephoned to before answering the call, and that the physician who did attend the child left a prescription which had been filled by a druggist on the promise of the man to pay for the same at some future time were sufficient elements for special "sob stories" in the lay press. Photographs of the family and of the bottle of medicine made absorption of the feature writers' stories the more appealing. The stories were no doubt read with avidity by many citizens, and therefore could be interpreted as having good news value.

That what took place was unfortunate cannot be denied. But the impression as given in the newspaper accounts, of cold-hearted physicians, was hardly warranted. In consideration of an instance such as this, society at large, and particularly lay citizens of means, may well ask themselves, if at the end of each year, they think they can give as commendable records of themselves as can the multitude of physicians, who in their offices and hospitals are constantly giving gratuitous service to their fellow men who come for free medical service when buffeted by the complex of disease or injury, with poverty.

That the happenings in the family group above cited are worthy of investigation and thought there can be no question. That the solution of such a problem should be found in better organized charity, maintained by the joint efforts of all citizens rather than through the gratuitous service of members of one profession would also seem to be a fair inference. That the lay press would probably be able to do a great service to the public by enlisting the aid of constituted public and private charities in this instance to ameliorate the poverty complex of which the infant's illness was only a part, would also seem reasonable.

This particular newspaper story is here discussed because it must seem difficult for many physicians to understand hasty criticisms of their profession, when year after year they have seen themselves and their fellow physicians give without stint, the most generous and efficient type of professional service to the poor.

It is hard to properly evaluate criticism that is based on an exceptional case of presumable tardiness in charitable action by a physician or physicians; and to explain why so much more publicity and display for such an instance should be given in the lay press than comes in the shape of kind words or other recognition throughout an entire year, to the hundreds of physicians and surgeons who are constantly giving of themselves and their professional services in most altruistic fashion to the lay public. Consistency in thought and judgment, at times certainly seems to be a somewhat rare attribute of many human beings.